



Good Afternoon Mr Speaker,

My name is Steve Hahn and I am a survivor of occupationally acquired PTSD. As a board certified flight nurse and paramedic who worked on the critical care medevac team at Yukon EMS from 2002-2011, I developed PTSD as a result of exposure to Yukon's citizens and visitors having the very worst days of their lives. My path to recovery was the hardest challenge I have ever had to face, with loss of a home, savings and possessions along the way. From time of going off work until I was diagnosed and eligible to receive benefits two years later.....I was brought to the brink of suicide, financial and mental health failure.

On Sept 5, 2011, I went to work a medevac day shift, tired, broken and emotionally exhausted. I had not slept in days and my hands shook uncontrollably from fear. Drenched in sweat, I did not know what was happening to me and felt I could not get out of my truck. I was suicidal and mission in-effective. I called in sick and went straight home to hide from the world. Friends called on me and a fellow paramedic texted me that I should call a crisis line. I was taken to hospital and admitted for my safety. This certainly saved my life that day.

The call the night before was to RCMP cells where a young man, suffering an acute psychotic break, was shackled, hobbled and put in cells. I was able to talk with him, get him to volunteer to go to hospital and take some anti-psychotic medications. As I put him on the stretcher, a well-meaning but ill-informed RCMP read him the riot act and caused him to go into a rage. I then had to aggressively sedate him and secure him to the stretcher. This left me emotionally triggered and having flash backs all night. While working solo medical crew medevac flights in Nunavut, I had been confronted with these types of clients on my aircraft and had to treat patients while one of the pilots came back to hold the patients down.

For me, this was the straw that broke the camels back. Children that I cared for who needed pediatric intensive care teams, trauma patients who bled out in front of my eyes, pregnant mothers whose babies were footling breech births, that I had to hold inside them until I could get to hospital, a 3 hr flight away. Ladies and gentlemen, these cases never leave your mind and will haunt you every day.

This pivotal event began a two year journey into the depths of my soul and the brink of ending my life. The result of a bad call five years previous that left unanswered questions, guilt and feelings of failure. I did not come to realize I had PTSD until 5 months later when a Psychiatric Nurse postulated that I might have operational stress injury secondary to my time in emergency services. Due to constant prodding of friends who had been diagnosed before me, I spent 6000 dollars of my own money to go to California to better understand if that is what was wrong with me. I was able to sit in the room with 14 first responders from different backgrounds who had the same symptoms and struggles I had. It was like a light went on in my head. When I came home, knowing that I had this condition, nobody would listen to me or undertake a proper diagnostic process. In one case, an assessment with a psychiatric specialist in Vancouver was cancelled, due to the recommendations by a social worker that I did not have enough exposure to trauma to warrant such a waste of money. Although my employer graciously paid for me to go to Ontario to attend an eight week post-traumatic stress recovery program, I had to write my own care plan, advocate for myself and in one case link several specialists and case workers together to present evidence on my behalf.

When I returned home, there was no plan. My primary care physician retired and I was adrift. Realize that flight nursing was my life. I was now unable to continue and it seemed that there was no hope. I still did not have a firm diagnosis and it seemed like I was falling through the cracks. Thanks to some excellent practitioners at community

mental health who were concerned about my health status, I was able to have a chance visit with a psychiatrist who specialized in PTSD. He put me on the right medications, set up lab work to verify issues secondary to PTSD and set me on the right trajectory. Moreover, I finally had a diagnosis. Without this diagnosis, my claim would have gone nowhere. In Sept 2013 I put in my claim and was finally accepted after a battery of assessments in Nov 2013. Because of the delay in diagnosis and the legislation as it is written, 85,000 dollars it took me to get back healthy enough to work, would not be reimbursed.

Some of you may be thinking right now: “that is what he signed up for”, or “it comes with the job suck it up!”. I had been working in critical care and pre-hospital practice since 1988, working in some of the most austere and difficult situations, providing care to the sickest and most vulnerable out there. I was an Army Medical Technician, Wilderness EMT, Registered Nurse and Primary Care Paramedic that was an expert in the field. I excelled at anything medical I tried. I was jump qualified, short hall and long line rated and topped many of the classes and certifications I attained. However; I was never educated in the toll it would take and how to be emotionally resilient in the face of tragedy. Plainly, if you think that I was weak and lacked the intestinal fortitude, please understand that I was most likely part of the team who cared for an aunt, father, child or even you when you needed care most. I went to the call when I was tired, hungry, it was snowing and it was uncomfortable. PTSD is an occupational hazard in emergency first response and the hazards need better mitigation and care for those affected.

The reason I came through this was due to my mental toughness, physical resilience and a core group of folks that never left my side. My care and recovery was both directed, orchestrated and financed to a large extent by me. Instead of it being easy, the road was blocked by ignorance, apathy and prejudice. Understand me when I write that I am

unique and not the norm. There are many responders who have become ill with PTSD, become frustrated with the lack of care and assistance and simply faded away.

Creating comprehensive presumptive legislation that assists firefighters, paramedics, flight nurses, community nurses, enforcement officers, social workers and corrections personnel is something that is truly needed in the Yukon. It will not be used as a crutch, but rather as a way to limit delays in treatment and aid in stopping the progression of the condition. I can honestly say that being sick with PTSD is debilitating and dangerous. What is needed is a plug and play process that speeds folks through the process without judgment or prejudice. I agree, we should also focus on prevention and early recognition, but when folks become ill, they need care that is timely and accessible. We need to be a leader in the North and not the "hold out jurisdiction" that does not want to face this real issue. I know for a fact ladies and gentleman that there are many responders in this territory suffering in silence. I am scared that we will have a responder commit suicide because of the lack of adequate processes to get them the help they deserve. This does not sit well with me. As I see brothers and sisters in other jurisdictions turn to suicide out of desperation and lack of efficient access to the financial, health and social support that they need during the acute phase of their illness. BC and Ontario have done it, now let's get behind our responders and show them that we will care for them here.

In closing, my motivation for seeing this legislation through is so that not another responder will be told by their supervisory team: "We knew you had PTSD all along, we just thought you knew how to take care of it, if it became serious!", like I was. This is not a crutch or a way so individuals can be lazy. Recovery from PTSD is possible, but it takes financial resources, work on the part of the individual and a clearly

articulated process to get the person healthy and ready to return to duty.

Thank You,

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